



News Release

U.S. Department of the Interior
U.S. Geological Survey

Address
Nevada District Office
333 West Nye Lane, Room 220
Carson City, Nevada 89706

Release	Contact	Phone	Fax
November 6, 2003	Kimball Goddard	775-887-7635	775-887-7629

Walker and Pyramid Lake Levels Down Again This Year

The continuing drought in the western United States is reflected in water-level declines in several lakes of western Nevada. For the fourth consecutive year, the water level of Walker Lake, north of Hawthorne, Nevada, has declined more than 3 feet, according to the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), Department of the Interior. The level of Pyramid Lake, northeast of Reno, also declined in each of the past four years, but by a lesser amount.

Net declines for the entire four-year period, October 1, 1999 to September 30, 2003 (Water Years 2000-2003), were 15.0 feet at Walker Lake and 7.8 feet at Pyramid. Those declines represented lake-water losses of 506,000 and 900,000 acre-feet, respectively. (An acre-foot is the quantity of water that would cover 1 acre to a depth of 1 foot; it is equivalent to almost 326,000 gallons.)

The four-year loss at Pyramid Lake was equivalent to only 4 percent of the volume in October 1999. In contrast, the net loss from Walker Lake was 21 percent of the initial volume in 1999.

Walker and Pyramid Lakes are fed by streamflow (dominantly from the Walker and Truckee Rivers, respectively), by lake-surface precipitation, and by minor ground-water inflow. Because both are terminal lakes—that is, they do not have outlets—all water loss is by lake-surface evaporation.

In contrast to the recent water-level declines, both lakes rose during the previous five-year period, October 1994 through September 1999 (Water Years 1995-1999). Those net rises totalled 11.8 feet for Walker Lake and 23.1 feet at Pyramid Lake. For the combined period, nine consecutive years, October 1994 through September 2003, Walker Lake had a 3.2-foot net decline, whereas Pyramid Lake had a 15.3-foot net rise.

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The first systematic, concurrent water-level measurements at the lakes were made three-quarters of a century ago, during calendar year 1928. In October of that year, Walker Lake was 4,049 feet above sea level and Pyramid Lake was at 3,843 feet. Seventy-five years later in September 2003, Walker Lake was about 110 feet lower, at 3,939.2 feet above sea level, while Pyramid Lake was down about 34 feet, to 3,809.4 feet.

The net water loss at Pyramid Lake between 1928 and 2003 (about 4.1 million acre-feet) was equivalent to 15 percent of the initial (1928) volume. At Walker Lake, in contrast, the concurrent loss (about 4.9 million acre-feet) represented 72 percent. Thus, only 28 percent of the initial (1928) volume remained at Walker Lake as of September 2003, whereas 85 percent remained at Pyramid Lake.

Additional information about USGS studies of water resources in Nevada may be obtained by e-mail to <GS-W-NVpublic-info@usgs.gov> or by visiting the USGS home page at <<http://nevada.usgs.gov>>.

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